

The Path of Right

Anthon Lund was visiting branches of the Church in Germany when word of Wilford Woodruff's revelation on sealings arrived in the European Mission. "This revelation will give joy to many hearts," he exclaimed when he learned the news.¹

The new practice had special significance for several elders in his mission. Ever since the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith that Saints could perform essential ordinances for the dead, Church members had been researching their ancestors and performing ordinances on their behalf. Some elders, the sons of immigrant Saints, had come to Europe hoping to gather more information about their ancestors from relatives and archives.²

Now, after President Woodruff's revelation, their research took on added purpose. Many Saints throughout the Church, in fact, had grown more eager to research their family lines in order to seal generations together in an unbroken chain. Apostle and Church historian Franklin Richards even planned to organize a Church-supported genealogical library.³

With hard economic times plaguing Europe and the United States alike, though, many European Saints had little hope of emigrating to Utah, the only place with temples where they could perform these ordinances for their ancestors. The financial crisis in the United States was making it all but impossible for Saints who did come to Utah to find work, and Church leaders worried that immigrants would flee the territory in search of employment. Financial disappointments had already led some of them to leave the fold.⁴

In July 1894, Anthon learned how dire the situation was in Utah. In an urgent letter to the European Mission, the First Presidency reported that the Church's financial burdens had become almost unbearable as more and more wards and stakes turned to the Church for monetary aid.

"In view of this state of things existing among us," the First Presidency wrote, "we deem it wisdom to instruct you to discourage emigration for the time being."⁵

The First Presidency, in making this request, was not ending the gathering of Israel. For over forty years, the Saints had earnestly sought to carry out the revelations commanding them to gather together. Missionaries had urged new converts from across the globe to move to Utah and be near the Lord's house. Yet that practice could not continue until the economic situation improved.⁶

"We constantly pray for the gathering of Israel and rejoice to see the Saints come to Zion," the First Presidency wrote, but added, "Great wisdom must be exercised in order that the best interests of gathered as well as ungathered Israel might be best conserved."

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Until conditions improved in Utah, the presidency instructed, Anthon was to strengthen the Church in Europe. “Let the Saints, one and all,” they wrote, “regard it as their moral and religious duty to do all they possibly can to assist the missionary elders in building up branches and maintaining them.”⁷

Anthon immediately sent copies of the letter to mission leaders, directing them to follow its counsel.⁸

On July 16, 1894, the United States Congress and President Grover Cleveland authorized the people of Utah to draft a state constitution. The First Presidency rejoiced later that day when they received a telegram from the Church’s allies in Washington: “Statehood bill signed. Your people are free; and this ends our labor.”⁹

When the Saints had first petitioned for a state government in 1849, the federal government granted them a territorial government instead. As citizens of a territory, the people of Utah were not allowed to choose a governor or other high government officials. Rather, they had to rely on the president of the United States to appoint officials for them. This system had led to many conflicts between the Saints, other Utahns, and the U.S. government over the years. It also barred Saints from holding some government offices. Under a state government, the people of Utah would finally be able to govern themselves.¹⁰

But the labor in Utah was just beginning. As delegates met in Salt Lake City to write the constitution, Emmeline Wells and other women leaders wrote a petition asking that the new constitution restore suffrage, or voting rights, to Utah’s women. Although most states and territories in the United States barred women from voting, Utah had granted suffrage to female citizens in 1870. Then, seventeen years later, the Edmunds-Tucker Act had revoked the right in order to weaken the Saints’ political power in the territory.¹¹

The act had outraged Emmeline and other women in Utah, leading them to organize women’s suffrage associations throughout the territory. They also continued working with other national and international suffrage organizations to fight for all women’s right to vote.¹² For Emmeline, suffrage and other rights had a sacred purpose. She believed that freedom was a principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Relief Society urged its members to be self-reliant and develop their abilities. In Church meetings, women also voted on ecclesiastical matters. Why should they not enjoy the same privilege in the public sphere?¹³

Yet women’s suffrage was a hotly debated issue, dividing even Church leaders.¹⁴ People who disagreed with women’s suffrage usually claimed that women were too emotional to make political decisions. They argued that women did not need to vote when they had husbands, fathers, and brothers to represent them at the ballot box.¹⁵ Elder B. H. Roberts, who was serving as a convention delegate, believed similarly. He also opposed including women’s suffrage in the constitution because

he believed it might make the document too controversial to receive approval from Utah voters.¹⁶

A constitutional convention opened in Salt Lake City in the spring of 1895. Since nonvoters were barred from participating officially in the proceedings, the women recruited the husband of one of the suffragists to present their petition to the delegates.¹⁷

On March 28, B. H. spoke about the issue at the convention. “While I concede that a majority of the people of this territory are in favor of woman suffrage,” he stated, “there is nevertheless a large number who are not in favor of it, and are bitterly opposed to it, and will vote against this constitution if it contains a provision granting it.”¹⁸

Two days later, Orson Whitney, a longtime bishop in Salt Lake City, addressed the convention on behalf of the suffragists. He declared that it was woman’s destiny to participate in government, and he urged the delegates to support women’s suffrage. “I regard it as one of the great levers by which the Almighty is lifting up this fallen world, lifting it nearer to the throne of its Creator,” he said.¹⁹

In an editorial for the *Woman’s Exponent*, Emmeline also voiced her disagreement with opponents of women’s suffrage. “It is pitiful to see how men opposed to woman suffrage try to make the women believe it is because they worship them so, and think them far too good,” she wrote. “The women of Utah have never failed in any time of trial of whatever name or nature, and their integrity is unquestioned.”²⁰

During the April 4 Relief Society meeting at general conference, Emmeline again spoke about women’s suffrage, confident the delegates at the convention would include it in the new state constitution. The next speaker, Jane Richards, invited the women in the room who supported suffrage to stand up. Every woman in the room rose to her feet.

At Emmeline’s request, President Zina Young then led the women in prayer, asking for the Lord’s blessing on their cause.²¹

While women in Utah Territory petitioned for the vote, Albert Jarman traveled from London to South West England to bear testimony to his father. He hoped to change William’s mind about the Church and put an end to his harmful lecturing. He believed his words, presented in a clear and understanding manner, could do his father good, if only he would listen.²²

Albert found William living comfortably in a city called Exeter. He was in good health, although his full head of white hair and bushy beard made him appear older than he was. More than a decade had passed since they had seen each other, and at first William still seemed suspicious of Albert’s identity.²³ After returning to England, William claimed, he had heard a rumor about Albert’s murder and wrote the First Presidency about it. When they did not respond, he said, he had assumed the worst.²⁴

After meeting face to face, though, Albert was able to convince him of his error.²⁵ President Lund's counsel that Albert study the gospel before trying to match wits with William had been wise. After reuniting with his father, Albert could tell he was an intelligent man.²⁶

But William was not unkind or abusive toward him. The winter of 1894–95 was harsh in England, aggravating respiratory problems Albert had developed. William let him stay in his family's home to recuperate until the weather improved. His wife, Ann, also did all she could to help Albert get well.²⁷

During his stay, Albert tried to bear testimony to his father, without success. At these times, Albert could not tell if his father deliberately lied about the Church or if he had said absurd things so often that he had come to believe them.²⁸

One day, William told Albert he was willing to stop attacking the Saints if the Church paid him £1,000. For this small price, he said, he would publicly admit that he was wrong about the Saints and never enter a lecture room to criticize the Church again. Albert passed the proposal on to President Lund, but the First Presidency rejected it.²⁹

Unable to change his father's mind about the Church, Albert left Exeter after a few weeks. Before they parted, he and William went to a photographer's studio to have portraits taken together. In one photograph, William sat at a table, his right hand pointing to a page in an open book, while Albert stood behind him. In another, the two men stood side by side as father and son. Behind William's whiskers was the trace of a smile.³⁰

The constitutional convention in Salt Lake City ended in May. To the joy of Emmeline Wells and countless others in Utah, the delegates voted to include women's suffrage in the constitution.³¹

After the convention, B. H. Roberts remained active in politics, despite his full-time Church responsibilities. His speeches against women's suffrage had been unpopular across the state. Yet his reputation as a preacher and lecturer remained strong in and out of the Church. In September, two months before the next election, Utah Democrats nominated B. H. as their candidate for the United States House of Representatives.³²

For decades, Church leaders had often held important government positions in Utah. The Saints had also voted as a bloc, sometimes sacrificing their individual political beliefs to preserve the Church's influence in the territory. But after the Saints split into different political parties in the early 1890s, Church leaders had become more sensitive about keeping matters of church and state separate, recognizing that not everyone in Utah had the same political opinions. At that time, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles agreed that general authorities should not influence voters by speaking publicly about politics.³³

During the constitutional convention, however, the First Presidency had temporarily suspended this counsel, allowing B. H. and other general authorities to serve as delegates. When B. H. later received the Democratic Party's nomination, he did not think he was wrong to accept it. Nor did he notice any objections from the First Presidency. Apostle Moses Thatcher felt the same way when the Democrats nominated him to run for the U.S. Senate.³⁴

At the October 1895 general priesthood meeting, however, Joseph F. Smith publicly rebuked the two men for accepting the nominations without first consulting the members of their quorums. "We have the living oracles in the Church, and their counsel must be sought," he reminded the congregation. "The moment a man in authority decides to do as he pleases, he steps on dangerous ground."³⁵

In his remarks, President Smith did not criticize B. H.'s political beliefs. Rather, he reaffirmed the Church's political neutrality as well as its policy that full-time Church leaders should focus their time and efforts on their ministry. After the meeting, however, members of the Republican Party seized on the reprimand to attack B. H.'s campaign. Since Joseph F. Smith was a Republican, many Democrats accused him of using his position in the Church to injure their party.³⁶

A short time later, in a newspaper interview, B. H. spoke of his respect for Church authority and stopped short of accusing the First Presidency of trying to hurt his campaign. Yet he insisted on his right to seek political office, despite the First Presidency's objections, because he believed he had violated no Church rules. Later he spoke more brazenly. At a political rally, he condemned men who used their influence in the Church to sway voters.³⁷

On Election Day, Republicans across the country won landslide victories against Democrats like B. H. Roberts and Moses Thatcher. And voters in Utah approved the new constitution with its provision granting voting rights to women.

B. H. tried to put on a cheerful face in public. He and his party knew someone had to lose. "It seems to have fallen to our party this time," he said.

But inside he felt the sting of his defeat.³⁸

On January 4, 1896, Utah became the forty-fifth state in the United States of America. In Salt Lake City, people fired off gun salutes and blew whistles. Bells rang out across the crisp, blue sky as people crowded the streets, waving flags and banners.³⁹

Heber J. Grant continued to worry about his friends B. H. Roberts and Moses Thatcher, though. Both men refused to apologize for not consulting their priesthood leaders before seeking public office, leading the First Presidency and the Twelve to conclude that they were putting their political careers ahead of their Church service. The First Presidency also believed that B. H. had unfairly criticized them and the Church in some of his political speeches and interviews.⁴⁰

On February 13, the First Presidency and a majority of the Twelve met in the Salt Lake Temple with B. H. and other presidents of the Seventy. During the meeting, the apostles asked B. H. about his statements against the First Presidency. B. H. affirmed everything he had said and done, taking none of it back.

As the meeting unfolded, Heber's heart grew heavy. One by one, the leaders pleaded with B. H. to humble himself, but their words had no effect. When Heber stood to address his friend, emotion overwhelmed him, choking his words.

After each apostle and seventy spoke, B. H. stood and said he would rather lose his place in the presidency of the Seventy than apologize for what he had done. He then asked the men in the room to pray that he not lose his faith.

"Will you pray for yourself?" asked apostle Brigham Young Jr.

"To tell the truth," said B. H., "I do not feel much like it now."

When the meeting ended, Heber offered a closing prayer. B. H. then tried to leave the room, but Heber caught hold of him and embraced him. B. H. broke free and stalked away, his expression hard.⁴¹

A few weeks later, on March 5, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles again met with B. H. and found him unchanged. President Woodruff gave him three weeks to reconsider his position. If he remained unrepentant, they would release him from the Seventy and prohibit him from using the priesthood.⁴²

The following week, Heber and his fellow apostle Francis Lyman arranged to meet privately with B. H. As they talked, B. H. told the apostles that he would not change his mind. If the First Presidency needed to find someone to take his place in the presidency of the Seventy, he said, they were free to do so.

B. H. put on his coat and started to leave. "I want you to know that the action that is to be taken against me is causing me the deepest sorrow," he said. "I do not want you to think that I fail to appreciate all that I am going to lose."

Heber noticed tears in his friend's eyes, and he asked him to sit down. B. H. then spoke of times when Church leaders had slighted him in public and preached in favor of the Republican Party. For two hours, Heber and Francis responded to his concerns and pleaded with him to change his course. Heber felt as if he and Francis were being blessed to know what to say.

When they finished speaking, B. H. told his friends that he wanted to think about his situation that night and get back to them with his decision in the morning. Heber then took leave of his friend, praying the Lord would bless him.⁴³

The next morning B. H. sent a short letter to Heber and Francis. "I submit to the authority of God in the brethren," it read in part. "Since they think I am wrong, I will bow to them, and place myself in their hands as the servants of God."

Heber made a copy of the letter immediately and ran across the street to President Woodruff's office.⁴⁴

About two weeks later, in the Salt Lake Temple, B. H. Roberts apologized to the First Presidency, admitting his error in not seeking permission to run for political office. He was sorry if anything he had said in public had caused rifts among the Saints, and he promised to make amends for any offense he gave.

He also said that during his conversation with Heber J. Grant and Francis Lyman, thoughts of his ancestors softened his heart.

“I am the only male representative in the Church on my father’s side, and also on my mother’s side,” he said, “and the thought of losing the priesthood and leaving my ancestors to rest without a representative in the priesthood worked very strongly upon my feelings.”

“I went to the Lord and received light and instruction through His Spirit to submit to the authority of God,” he continued. “I express to you my desire and prayer that I may be able to make such satisfaction, and pass through whatever humiliation you may see proper to put upon me, in the hope of retaining at least the priesthood of God, and to have the privilege of doing the work for my fathers in this holy house.”⁴⁵

The First Presidency accepted B. H.’s apology. Ten days later, under the direction of President Woodruff, George Q. Cannon drafted a statement clarifying the Church’s position on its leaders’ involvement in politics. He then presented the statement to the First Presidency and general authorities of the Church for their approval.⁴⁶

The following day, at the April 1896 general conference, Heber J. Grant read the statement to the Saints. Every general authority of the Church had signed it except Anthon Lund, who was still in Europe, and Moses Thatcher, who had refused to reconcile with the First Presidency and his fellow apostles.

Called the “Political Manifesto,” the statement affirmed the Church’s belief in the separation of church and state. It also required all general authorities who committed themselves to full-time service in the Lord’s work to secure the approval of their quorum leaders before seeking or accepting any political office.⁴⁷

At the conference, B. H. Roberts urged the Saints to sustain their ecclesiastical leaders, and he testified of the enduring work of the Lord. “In this dispensation, the unfailing word of God has been pledged to the stability of the work, notwithstanding the imperfections of the people,” he declared.

“Even though some might have stumbled in the darkness,” he said, “they might still return to the path of right, taking advantage of its unerring guidance to the good of salvation.”⁴⁸

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3. Allen, Embry, and Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 33–34, 42–47. **Topic: Family History and Genealogy**
4. Anthon H. Lund to Sarah Peterson Lund, Aug. 25, 1893, Letterbooks, volume 1, 53; James E. Talmage to Anthon H. Lund, Aug. 16, 1894, Anthon H. Lund Papers, CHL; First Presidency to Anthon H. Lund, July 5, 1894, First Presidency Letterpress Copybooks, volume 28; George Q. Cannon, Journal, Sept. 28, 1893.
5. First Presidency to Anthon H. Lund, July 5, 1894, First Presidency Letterpress Copybooks, volume 28. **Topic: Emigration**
6. *Saints*, volume 2, chapters 10–14; see also Thirteenth General Epistle, Oct. 1855, in Neilson and Waite, *Settling the Valley*, 242–44, 248–49.
7. First Presidency to Anthon H. Lund, July 5, 1894, First Presidency Letterpress Copybooks, volume 28. **Topic: Gathering of Israel**
8. Anthon H. Lund to First Presidency, Aug. 4, 1894, First Presidency Mission Administration Correspondence, CHL; Lund, Journal, July 30, 1894.
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13. Emmeline B. Wells, “Letter to the Sisters at Home,” *Woman’s Exponent*, Apr. 1, 1886, 14:164; [Emmeline B. Wells], “Editorial Thoughts,” *Woman’s Exponent*, May 1, 1888, 16:180; Doctrine and Covenants 26:2; 28:13.
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15. Harrison, *Separate Spheres*, 80; Roberts, “Life Story of B. H. Roberts,” 369–70.

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